

142.
A
SERMON

Occasioned by the

DEATH

Of the late REVEREND

Mr. Thomas Kerby;

Preach'd at

Glasshouse-yard in Goswel-street,

December 20, 1727.

By JOSEPH MORRIS.

L O N D O N:

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Heb. xiii. 7.

Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

THIS epistle was manifestly written with a design to confirm the believing Hebrews in the profession of Jesus Christ. For this purpose the author proves by various arguments judiciously chosen, and managed with admirable skill, that the christian institution far excels the law of Moses on divers accounts: and represents to them the dreadful consequences of apostacy, with the glorious rewards of constancy and perseverance. In the eleventh chapter he shews them the usefulness and necessity of faith, by setting before them the example of several of their own ancestors, who by a firm belief in God had obtained great blessings, overcome the most powerful temptations, and patiently endured the worst of evils. But as those things which are nearest generally strike us with greatest force, he exhorts them in the text to remember and imitate the steadfastness of their

their own ministers, who were but lately deceased. That they had lost some of their ministers before this time will appear extremely probable, if we consider that this epistle was written about thirty years after the ascension of Christ; not to one church, but to all the churches of the believing Hebrews; which were undoubtedly many, as is plain from the words of St. Paul *. Besides, they who were placed over the churches of Christ at first, were generally men in years, from whence they were called Elders †: which makes it the more probable that some of them had departed this life before the date of this epistle. As some might be removed from them by natural death, so others, 'tis very likely, might suffer martyrdom when persecution raged with ‡ so much fierceness. We know St. Stephen and St. James were put to death. And it may be reasonably thought he would speak of such as were deceased; because they were the fittest to be proposed as examples of perseverance: but what is so reasonable in it self, is evident from his expressions in the text. When he speaks of the living ††, he does not exhort to remember them; because these being with them were not proper objects of their remembrance; and therefore they, whom they ought to remember, were not living with them, but absent by death. When he says, *who have spoken to you the word of God*, it implies, that they did not then continue to speak it, but were silent in the grave. * *By the end of their conversation*, he means not the end which they pro-

* 1 Thes. ii. 14. Gal. i. 22. See also Act. ix. 21, 32.
 † Πρεσβύτεροι. ‡ Acts xxvi. 10. †† Ver. 17. * This is plainly the sense of the original. Απαθεωροῦντες τὴν ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς. Αἰσχρονομία, ζῶνς, Hesych. He seems to have reference to this place.

proposed to themselves in their actions, but the conclusion of their lives, or christian race, which supposes them to be dead. Therefore these words should not have been translated, *Remember them who have the rule over you* ; but, † your rulers, or them who have had the rule over you, *who have spoken to you the word of God* ; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation : that is, how well they ended their lives. What was their case and duty at that time is made our own, in some respect, by the death of our dear brother, whose remains lie before us ; who for many years has preached the word of God to this congregation, and has now finished his course with joy.

In explaining these words to you upon this occasion, I propose to consider,

I. The description of the deceased ministers of the Hebrews, *Who have had the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God.*

II. Wherein they were to remember them, not only as preachers of the word, but as examples of steadfastness: *Considering the end of their conversation.*

III. The end for which they are exhorted to remember them, that they might *follow their faith.*

IV. The obligation they were under to remember them, arising chiefly from the relation between them : *Who have had the rule over you.*

V. I shall make some inferences, which will naturally arise out of these words.

I.

† The Greek word *ἡγούμενον*, will bear this rendering.

I. I am to consider the description of the deceased ministers of the Hebrews, as they had *the rule over them*, and had *spoken to them the word of God*: which two things comprehend the whole work of the ministers of the gospel. They had the rule over them, being some of the apostles themselves; or other disciples of Christ, to whom they had committed the care of particular churches. But from this and other like expressions, we must not conceive that the ministers of the gospel have power to make laws, and to govern the church of Christ as they will. He is the sole lawgiver and head of his church, and has not given his ministers power to alter his institutions, and to impose what laws they please upon his people. Much less have they a right to erect courts of inquisition, and to condemn those to corporal punishments who will not submit to their dictates. All impositions and coercive measures are most contrary to the spirit and design of Christ, who came *not to be ministered to, but to minister*; not to *destroy, but to save the lives of men*. He severely rebuked the over-zealous sons of Zebedee, when they would have called down fire from heaven upon the inhospitable Samaritanes; and commanded all his disciples not to affect an arbitrary dominion and imperious rule over their brethren; but in imitation of him, to distinguish themselves by exercising their abilities for the service and good of all. * *But Jesus call'd them to him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. And who-*
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* Matt. xx. 25, 26, 27.

soever will be chief among you, let him be your minister. The apostles themselves only pretended to deliver to men those doctrines and laws of Christ, which were to be the rule of their faith and behaviour : but * claimed not a dominion over their faith, nor assumed a power to change the original institutions of Jesus Christ. St. Paul † tells the Galatians, that *tho he or an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel than that which he had preached to them at first*, they should not receive it. Nothing can be more contrary to those qualifications which are required of ministers in the scripture, nor to those injunctions which are given them by the apostles, than to exercise a tyrannical power over the consciences of men, in order to advance themselves : and severe will be the doom of those who *smite their fellow servants*, instead of instructing them with meekness, and convincing them by solid arguments. *When the Lord ‡ comes, he will appoint such their portion with hypocrites.* He has not therefore empower'd his ministers to give laws, or impose articles of faith ; which would be to resign his kingdom and power into those hands, which are not fit to be intrusted with them ; and to subject his most perfect institution to perpetual changes and innovations. How sad the effects of this would be, may be seen from the state of that church, whose ministers have assumed an arbitrary power ; in which the most senseless opinions are imposed on men as articles of faith under the severest penalties, and the word of God is detain'd from the people to make way for their own traditions. But tho our Lord Jesus Christ has not given his ministers a despotick power over his

* 2 Cor. i. 24.

† Chap. i. 8.

‡ Matt. xxiv. 48, 51.

his church, yet he has given them commission and authority to declare his will, to administer his ordinances, and to perform those offices which are for the good of his people. No society can be maintain'd in a happy state, unless some good order and government be preserv'd; there must be a regular method for the admission of new members; some rules of behaviour to be observ'd towards one another; certain conditions fix'd, on which they are to enjoy the privileges and immunities of the society; some proper persons appointed to whose care and inspection these things are committed, that there may be no disorder and confusion, and what is necessary for the common good may not be neglected. Now it being the will of our Lord that his people should form themselves into religious societies for their mutual assistance, and the better maintaining his institution in the world, he has directed that fit persons be regularly chosen and solemnly ordain'd to perform those offices which are for the good of the whole body. His ministers therefore are not lords over their flocks, but officers under him the *great shepherd and bishop of souls*, who are to act according to his directions and laws. All their power and authority consist in performing the several parts of their function to which they are called by the church; in explaining the doctrine and laws of Christ, as he intimates in these words: ** Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom the Lord hath made ruler over his house to give them meat in due season?* in receiving those into communion who have a right to it; in reproving them who act amiss, as St. Paul informs

* Mat. xxiv. 45.

forms us : * *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them who are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; neither as † being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock ; in declaring them excluded from communion, whom the society judges unworthy. This is the utmost of their power, the weapons of whose warfare are not carnal but spiritual ; who ought to teach, persuade, intreat and reprove, but have no authority to use external force and compulsion : who must so rule as yet to be the ‡ servants of the church for Jesus's sake, and must therefore observe his laws, but have no right to impose their own. The word therefore may be allowed to express that just authority which bishops and elders have in those churches over which they are ordained ; provided it be also acknowledged, that it consists in ruling according to the laws of Christ, in guiding them by a good example, and directing them by his laws, as the original word signifies, and the next clause, *who have spoken to you the word of God*, seems to import. The gospel of Jesus Christ is thus called, because it originally comes from God, and contains a declaration of his will to mankind. Therein he has given us a clear and certain knowledge of many important truths which were wholly unknown, or but obscurely understood before. He has shewn us in what way he will accept of returning sinners ; how we must worship him ; that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust ; and what will be the state of good and bad men after this life. To these great truths is added, a most complete body of laws for the government of our temper and actions*

* 1 Thes. v. 12,

† 1 Pet. v. 3.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 5.

in every relation and state of life. These principles and laws are not deliver'd to us as probable only, like the opinions and rules of the philosophers; but as those things which the supreme Being requires us to believe and practise, as conditions of our enjoying his favour and eternal life. This gospel had been preach'd to the Hebrews by their ministers, who had not only converted them to the faith, but instructed them in the several principles of the doctrine of Christ, and explained to them the rules of the christian practice.

'Tis the business of all ministers of the gospel to preach the word. *Feed my sheep*, says our Lord to St. Peter; and the same injunction St. Paul gives to the elders of the church at Ephesus; * *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.* In the discharge of this part of their office great faithfulness is requir'd, that they may not mix the pure word of God with their own or other men's inventions; that they may not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, nor yet deliver any thing as his will which is not declar'd in the scriptures. An excess on this hand is to be avoided as carefully as a defect on the other, it being forbidden to add to, as well as to take from the word of God.

The surest way to avoid these extremes, is to imitate our blessed Lord and his holy apostles, the most perfect models of good preaching. They explain and enforce the rules of living, as well as open the gracious method of our redemption. They deliver the great truths of our holy religion without any of those metaphysical subtleties,

* Acts xx. 28.

ties, which have raised so many hurtful disputes, and teach the christian worship without those burdensome ceremonies, with which it has been encumbered in the church of *Rome* by superstitious and designing men.

II. Wherein they were to remember their deceased ministers ; not only as preachers of the word, but as examples of stedfastness, *considering the end of their conversation*. To be sure they could not reflect on the death of such excellent instructors without sorrow and trouble, nor mention their names without honour and respect ; but what could it signify to extol their endowments, and commend their virtues, if all this had no good effect upon their own practice ? They could not properly remember them as those who had spoken to them the word of God ; unless they firmly adher'd to their doctrine, and made it the rule of their lives. It was their duty to recollect those earnest exhortations to purity and stedfastness, which they had given them in publick and private, that they might not be lost upon them, but have their due influence upon their conduct. They ought not to forget, but to fix upon their minds those motives to perseverance which they had often heard from their mouths, that these might continually determine their choice, and inspire them with good resolutions. They were concern'd not only to observe their instructions, advice and exhortations, but also to consider their exemplary lives. He represents them to be such as had preach'd to them by their conversation as well as by their discourses, and had been bright examples of those virtues which they had recommended to their practice. Their own manners became their holy profession, and were worthy of their publick character ; and therefore they ought to follow their steps as

faithful guides, who had not only shewn them the way, but had gone before them in it with resolution and constancy. They were to imitate the meekness of their spirits, and the purity of their conversation ; their noble contempt of this world, and great patience in bearing affliction. They should review their lives, that they might from thence see how to govern their affections toward present things, and to be contented in their condition, as appears from the preceding verse. But that on which he chiefly exhorts them to fix their eyes, is the end of their holy conversation, or the conclusion of their lives, and the manner of their leaving this world. Their end was answerable to the former part of their life, and crown'd with complete victory over all temptations. Tho they were men of like passions with themselves, and had also suffer'd great losses and hardships ; yet they were not cast down, discouraged, nor overcome by any of their dangers and sufferings, but held fast their integrity, and died in the christian faith and practice. Nay, some of them had not only persevered thro' other trials, but had sealed their doctrine with their own blood. St. James, as I intimated before, and others, counted not their own lives dear to them, but bravely sacrific'd them to the interest of their blessed master, and the hopes of a joyful resurrection. But then the great sufferings and violent death which some of their ministers had undergone, might rather fill 'em with fear and dread, than with courage and resolution ; unless they had been enabled to bear them with patience and comfort. We must suppose him therefore to have a farther view, and to advise them to remember what an end they made, and how decently and chearfully they went off the stage of this world ; that they were not

not forsaken, but powerfully supported in all their trials ; and were enabled to meet death with courage, and to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. What ravishing views of his exalted saviour and approaching glory had St. Stephen, when he was ready to expire under the hands of his merciless countrymen ? How justly might this animate them to follow the steps of their pious guides, since they also might find as great satisfaction in suffering for a good conscience, and had reason from hence to expect all necessary assistance and support ? They could not but pronounce them happy, who had fought a good fight and kept the faith. Tho some of them had but a rough passage out of this world, yet it was short, and soon carry'd them to the haven of eternal rest. Whether they died a natural or a violent death, they gained infinitely by dying. They were at once released from all the common pains and sorrows of this life, and placed above the reach of cruel persecutors : they were past all danger of falling, and had nothing before them but an eternity of perfect joy and felicity. Now if they did not only keep in mind their exhortations, and consider their lives ; but also remember'd how comfortably some of them were carry'd thro' the most cruel sufferings, and what unspeakable glory and happiness all of them gain'd by their perseverance ; they ought not surely to be discourag'd and driven back by any difficulties, but should resolutely adhere to their christian profession, and steddily follow the steps of their spiritual guides. This brings me to the

III^d Thing, or the end for which they are exhorted to remember their ministers ; that they might *follow their faith* *. What he intends by faith may be judged from the design and former part of this epistle.

* Μιμεῖσθε τὴν πίσιν.

epistle. He cautions them against that diffidence and unbelief * which made their † fathers fall in the wilderness ; and exhorts them to *take heed, lest there should be in any of them an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.* By faith therefore, he means a sincere belief in God, according to the christian religion, and a sure dependance on the promises of that blessed life and immortality, which are brought to light by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The belief of a future state of perfect rest and joy is the most effectual remedy against the fear of dying, and the strongest consolation under all sufferings for a good conscience. He therefore excites them, as I said, in the eleventh chapter to imitate those great men, who in former times had gone thro' divers sufferings with unconquerable patience, because they had trusted in God, and expected an eternal reward. Above all, he directs them, *To look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith ; who for the joy which was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God ‡.* This faith in the promises of God, and hope of glory thro' Jesus Christ, had carry'd their deceased ministers thro' all their labours with comfort, and had been their great support in all trials. They stedfastly persevered, *because they walked by faith, not by sight ; not looking at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen and are eternal.* They kept their innocence, notwithstanding all the allurements of present ease and pleasure ; because their affections were chiefly set on those everlasting pleasures they hoped to enjoy in heaven. This likewise was their victory over all the terrors of this world, even their faith, which made all present things contemptible in their eyes, when set in competition with their future inheritance ; all evils light, when put in
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* Ch. iv. 11.

† Ch. iii. 12.

‡ Ch. xii. 2.

the scales against that eternal weight of glory which they expected. He directs them therefore to consider how their ministers had kept their integrity, and cheerfully suffer'd evil in hope of a blessed immortality, that they might not relapse into unbelief; but might likewise continue stedfast in the expectation of the glorious rewards of another life as revealed in the gospel. But in order to imitate their faith, they ought not only to live in the expectation of a future recompence, but to be suitably influenc'd by their hope, and to act as became those who were really persuaded of the truth of the divine promises, and the reality of the invisible world. They should faithfully persevere to the end of their lives, neither renouncing their holy profession, nor their christian practice for fear of any present evils, or for any temporal advantages; but on the contrary be stedfast in the belief of Jesus Christ, and live righteously in hope of eternal salvation. The original word indeed sometimes signifies fidelity, and in this sense it may be taken in our text; but tho we take it as here translated, it will amount to the same thing, since they were obliged to imitate the sincerity of their faith, and in consequence of their expecting a blessed resurrection, to persevere in a holy life, and bear evils patiently, that they might be as happy in their end as their pastors were who died in the Lord. I proceed,

IV. To consider the obligation they were under to remember their deceased ministers, that they might *follow their faith*. Christians are not indeed oblig'd to receive by an implicit faith, whatever their ministers say, and to yield a blind obedience to their authority. The laws of Christ are to be their rule, and his life their great pattern; and consequently they cannot be bound to follow their ministers any farther than they teach and practice what
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is agreeable to his doctrine and example. This, I am sure, is all the regard which St. Paul claims from the Corinthians*; *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*. But then our writer is speaking of those ministers, whose doctrine and lives were plainly consonant to the commands and example of Christ and therefore the Hebrews were engag'd to hear their instructions, and follow their practice. All pious examples are useful, and ought to be regarded, because they direct and encourage us to do good: For this reason, he exhorts the Hebrews to be *followers of them, who thro' faith and patience inherit the promises*. But other examples being more distant, could not give so great a light as that of those excellent men, with whom they had long and familiarly convers'd. Their state was much the same, and in them they had seen those virtues exemplified, which they were more especially called to practise. They might more easily trace their steps, who were but just gone before them; and were therefore more particularly oblig'd to follow them. But the obligation rises higher, when we consider that they were not only more near and suitable patterns, but also their own ministers. There is no relation between men, but there must arise particular obligations from thence, which make it their duty to act suitably towards one another. For what end were these ministers sent to explain to them the doctrines of Christ, and to set them a good example, but that they might understand and perform their duty, and be confirm'd in the faith by their good counsels, and holy conversation? If their ministers were bound to speak to them the word of God, and to guide them by their actions, as well as by their doctrines, it was certainly their duty to regard their instructions, and to tread in their steps.

* 1 Cor. xi. 1.

† Ch. vi. 11.

steps. The good instructions they receiv'd from them were not only for present use, but for the conduct of their whole lives ; and therefore were not to be buried with them, but to be observ'd after their departure. The religion of Jesus Christ, which they deliver'd to them, is not to cease, but to remain in force to the end of the World ; for which reason it demanded an unshaken adherence. To have had ministers, who did not only instruct them by their discourses, but were likewise patterns of purity and constancy, was no small advantage. This might render their precepts more plain, and make them more easily remembred. What we read or hear is apt to slip out of our thoughts ; but what we see makes a deeper impressiion, and is not so soon forgotten. We can better understand how to act in any particular case by seeing the good actions of others, than by the best directions. Many things, which we cannot clearly perceive when we only hear them, become extremely plain when we see them acted before our eyes. The example of their leaders might likewise remove all discouragement, doubting, and fears, and give them good hope of success in *working out their own salvation*. From thence they might see that all the directions of their ministers were practicable, and that the blessing of God would never be wanting to them, if they did not neglect what was requir'd on their part. Now this might induce them to remember and imitate their ministers, because all advantages here enjoy'd must be accounted for in the great day of judgment. And since all men must render an account of the means and opportunities, of the exhortations and helps which are afforded them ; they could not but think that their having had the benefit of such great lights and faithful guides would be brought into their

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reckoning. If they did not persist in their holy practice, and hold fast their profession, notwithstanding all difficulties, they would be the more inexcusable, because their ministers had neglected nothing on their part; but had done what they could to persuade and encourage them, by proposing the most inviting motives of the gospel, and leaving them a good example of constancy. The way of salvation by Jesus Christ was one and the same to them and their ministers, obedience to his commands, and patient suffering for his sake. *Not every one, who saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who doth the will of my father who is in heaven* *. And if any Man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me †. It was their duty therefore to imitate the faith and perseverance of their ministers, if they would enter into that blessed place, whither they were gone before them.

V. Having thus explain'd the text, I shall now proceed to some inferences which seem naturally to arise out of the present subject. And,

1. We should avoid all wrong methods of shewing our respect to the memory of departed ministers. The greatest honour we can do them is to transcribe their shining virtues into our own temper and lives. 'Tis not evil indeed to perpetuate their names by erecting monuments, but to neglect their virtues at the same time is a great fault. Some shew their remembrance of those who have had the rule over them by various methods, which are far from being so innocent as this, and are a great disgrace to the christian religion.

* Mat. vii. 21.

† Mat. xvi. 24.

religion. They worship their relicks and go long pilgrimages to their temples; they bow before their images, and pray to them as intercessors with God, which is gross superstition and idolatry, injurious to the honour of our blessed mediator, and most directly contrary to his holy institution. We see none of these things indeed among protestants, but there is one way of idolizing deceased ministers, from which they cannot be excused. More regard is too often paid to their opinion and writings, than to those of the holy apostles. With some the authority of Luther, Calvin, Arminius, and other great men, is in such high esteem, that their judgment is made the rule of faith, and the scripture it self must be strained and forced to speak their sentiments. But now tho these and other reformers were excellent men, yet they were not infallible; and we must make a great difference between them and those who spake the word of God to the Hebrews. The Gospel was preach'd to the Hebrews by the apostles and their inspired companions, who committed to writing the doctrine which they receiv'd from Jesus Christ; and therefore they were not only oblig'd to follow their example, but to adhere inviolably to their doctrine; but all who have lived since those times were bound to make the scripture their rule, and are to be tried by the scripture. And so many corruptions had crept in thro' a long course of dark centuries, that 'tis no wonder if the reformation was not brought to a just perfection at once, but something was left for them who succeeded. We should not therefore have so much regard to the authority of the reformers in any sect, or of any deceased ministers whatsoever,

as not to examine their opinions by the bible ; but should form our judgment and govern our actions by this rule, tho we are obliged to dissent from them. An immoderate veneration for the dead, has made the good wishes and pious attempts of the living unsuccessful, and put a stop to the good work of the reformation ; has prevented the restoring primitive christianity, and with that the union of christians.

2. If christians ought to remember their ministers, their ministers ought to do things worthy of remembrance. They must preach with such seriousness and gravity, discharge every part of their office with such diligence and impartiality, that they may not only be esteemed while they live, but may be remembered with honour when they have finished their course. For this end they must not feed their flocks with such thin and empty speculations as are of little or no importance, and better forgotten perhaps than remembered : but instruct them in the true grounds of the christian religion, in the plain and necessary principles of our holy faith, in the whole compass of their christian duties, especially in those which are most neglected. They must clearly explain the nature of that salvation, which Jesus Christ has wrought out for us ; and rightly state the terms on which it is to be enjoy'd. These things are necessary for all to understand, and well deserve to be imprinted in their memories. They must so affectionately warn them against all sin, more particularly against those which are most prevailing and apt to entangle them ; so earnestly press upon their consciences the necessity of a holy life ; so faithfully reprove them, when there is occasion, that their words may lie with great weight upon their minds,

minds, and influence their practice, after their departure. But as the most useful discourses from the pulpit will not gain them respect, nor the most seasonable admonitions be regarded, while they are living, without a holy conversation: so neither will it be much to their honour to be remember'd as good preachers, if they have not also been exemplary in their lives. They must not only endeavour to preach well, but to be *an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity**. Their pious actions may, perhaps, leave a more lasting impression than the most moving discourses; and will preach to their people, when their mouths are stopt in the silent dust.

3. If christians should thus remember their deceased pastors, they ought to have due regard to the living: they should impartially hear and consider what they offer, and receive it, if they find it agreeable to the word of God. They should attend to their discourses with a sincere desire to know their duty, and with a hearty resolution to practise it, however contrary to their former inclinations. But I know not how it comes to pass, that their discourses are heard as exercises of wit, rather than instructions of piety: and the hearers set up for judges of the performance, instead of correcting their own manners. That which carries an air of strictness is considered as the fancy of the preacher, rather than a rule of the christian life. But let them, who despise what their ministers say, take care that they despise not him who sent them. That they may hear them with due regard and profit, they must respect them for their work's sake. 'Tis indeed a most pre-

* 1 Tim. iv. 12.

preposterous thing to honour the memory of the dead, and not to treat the living with due esteem and respect. *We beseech you, brethren* *, says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, *to know (or shew respect to them) who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them highly in love for their works sake.* Our blessed Lord blames the Jews, who *built the tombs of the prophets, and garnish'd the sepulchres of the righteous*, but did not treat him with due respect. I am not contending for more respect than is due to their function well exercised. If any usurp an unreasonable dominion over the faith and consciences of their fellow servants, in order to promote their own interest instead of saving the souls of men, let them bear the blame, which they justly deserve. For our parts, I speak for these my brethren as well as for my self, we shall be satisfied with that respect, which is due to our office ; which is necessary for your good, and cannot be denied us without disobliging your Lord. We desire not to have our word taken, any farther than it is agreeable to the scripture ; nor to have any thing received as an article of faith, which is not there plainly revealed. All our ambition is to be useful in our places, and we desire your esteem and affection, that our labours may neither be unprofitable to you, nor unpleasant to our selves : that we may give up our account with joy, and not with grief. Suffer me therefore to put you in mind of what our writer says to the Hebrews, concerning their duty to those ministers who were alive : † *Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit your selves* (to all their instructions, exhortations, and reproofs, which are agreeable to the will of Christ) *for they watch for your souls, as they who must give*

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* 1 Ep. 5. 12. † Ver. 17.

an account : that they may do it with joy and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you.

4. We may from hence observe the necessity of perseverance in the christian life. 'Tis not enough to set out well, but we must hold on to the end of the race, if we would be crown'd with immortal life. That in which he principally excites them to follow their departed ministers, was their stedfastness in their holy religion, notwithstanding all the reproach and tribulation which they endured for the name of Christ. We are not, blessed be God, exercised with those severe trials, thro' which they passed : but yet there are many other causes of falling away, besides persecution. Many, who could not be moved by the terrors of this world, have been overcome by the soft allurements of sensual pleasures, and seduced by the deceitfulness of sin. Hence they fall into a vicious course of living, and gradually slide into unbelief. But tho we continue in the faith of Jesus Christ, this will not give us a title to heaven, if our conversation be not as becometh his Gospel. Heaven, as I have often told you, is a state of perfect holiness, for which we must be disposed by a virtuous course of living. Our blessed Saviour did not come to carry us thither unprepared ; but to fit us for it by redeeming us from all iniquity, and raising us to a heavenly temper and life. The glory above is reserved for them, who *continue patient in well doing.*

Of this perseverance our deceased brother has left us all an excellent example. He was faithful in his place as a minister, *a workman who needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* He
was

was a very industrious labourer in the work of his great master, frequently preaching three times a day, when he was in his strength and vigour : and did not wholly leave off, till he was past the eightieth year of his age. I am sensible that I, who knew him not before his declining years, cannot give his character as a minister with sufficient advantage. This however I must observe, that he truly preached Christ and him crucified, not only explaining the method of our common salvation, but likewise faithfully declaring the whole will of God. His doctrine was free from those new notions, which tend to weaken the motives to a good life, which our holy religion propounds. He preached the necessity of obedience as well as of faith, not thinking that in order to preach Jesus Christ, he must speak meanly of those good works, *which God has ordained that we should walk in them*, and strain any text to speak of Christ and his righteousness, in spite of the literal sense and the whole context : which, whatever end it may answer, I cannot see how it can promote the true knowledge of scripture, or be reconciled with due reverence for it as the word of God. His preaching was suitable to the great design of the grace of God, which is to teach us, *that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should walk soberly, righteously and godly in this present world**.

His discourses, therefore, generally ran upon practical and useful subjects. He did not entertain his auditory with nice and difficult speculations, which tend to fill mens heads with conceit, and to beget unnecessary disputes : but neither make the heart better, nor reform the life.

He

* Tit. ii. 12.

He well considered that a holy conversation is more necessary to prepare us for heaven than a set of the truest notions : and therefore he preached Christ, * *warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

He was not only a diligent and useful preacher, but discharged every part of his office with great fidelity. He was an excellent example of what he taught. His life did not contradict his publick discourses, but was a clear comment upon them, and gave weight to all his exhortations. His piety towards God was sincere, unaffected, and solid. He was a kind relation, and a faithful friend, who knew how to give advice, and to keep a secret. He was humble and modest. His temper was formed on that of his blessed master, and like the genius of that religion he preached, mild and peaceable. His moderation was known to all, and no man was farther from that rash judging which our Lord condemns. He had indeed a due zeal for the great and plain truths of christianity ; but in those abstruse matters and nice speculations, in which the best and most learned men are not agreed, and which have been debated with too much warmth, he thought we should not be wise above what is written, nor treat one another uncharitably for our different conceptions. To him it justly seemed a very ill thing to trample on the plainest laws of justice and charity to promote any speculative opinion, especially since after all, 'tis possible, we may be mistaken. And when I look back and consider what heats and animosities, what strife and contention, what uncharitable and unrighteous actions, have proceeded from an intemperate

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* Col. i. 28.

perate zeal and unjust inquisition into the private sentiments of men, I cannot but think it a great happiness as well as an excellent virtue in him, that he was always for mild and peaceable measures, for charity and forbearance; an enemy to contention, censoriousness, and all the methods of persecution.

His charity to the poor was great, considering his circumstances. It was his custom to give them something when he made them visits, especially in their sickness. He lived frugally, that he might have to bestow, and used to give clothing to them who wanted. He invited some poor persons to dine with him at certain times, observing the directions of our blessed Lord, who commands us to bid them who cannot invite us again.

His gratitude for kindnesses received, is manifest from the legacies he gave them who preached for him sometimes in the latter part of his life.

He was not a man of art and design; but of great plainness and simplicity. I have never heard any man more commended for his integrity, nor, I believe, more deservedly. Sincerity, the soul of all virtue, appeared in his whole conversation. * *His rejoicing was truly this, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had his conversation in the world, and more abundantly towards them with whom he was more immediately concerned.*

But I cannot now be more particular in mentioning his remarkable temperance, and those other virtues which adorned his conversation; and

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

and shall conclude with that, which finished his useful life, his constant perseverance in well doing. His great integrity, thro' the blessing of God, enabled him to conquer the temptations of this World, so that his whole life was one continued course of piety and good works. He was steadfast in those troublesome times, which preceded the glorious revolution; and has been always happily preserved from those great failings, which have sometimes blemished the lives of otherwise good and valuable men. He maintained the honour of his profession and office to the last: and considering the iniquity of the times, and the fashionableness of evil-speaking, it is a great happiness that he has not only kept a good conscience towards God, but preserved an unstained reputation * thro' so long a course of years. Having faithfully persevered, he died in the hope of a blessed resurrection; which we doubt not but he will obtain thro' Jesus Christ.

What now remains but that we bless God for this excellent example, and follow it in our several places. Let us who minister be like him, meek towards all men, † *as becometh the servants of Christ*; ‡ *in all things shewing ourselves patterns of good works, in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity*. Let us be faithful as is required of them who are †† *Stewards of the mysteries of God*, and give to every one his meat in due season; let us *make full proof of our ministry*, and improve our talents for the good of the church, that when the Lord cometh, he may say to every one of us, as well as to our deceased Brother,

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ther,

* He died in the eighty sixth year of his age.
 † Tit. ii. 7. †† 1 Cor. iv. 1.

† 2 Tim.

ther, * *Well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

Consider, my brethren, who are members of this congregation, how much you in particular are obliged to remember him, *who has spoken to you the word of God.* Forget not those useful instructions, those serious exhortations to love, peace and holiness, which he has given you from this place. You are very free in speaking great things of your late pastor, be as careful to observe his directions, and to imitate his meekness, temperance, charity, and other virtues. For these forty years in which he has been your elder, you have heard nothing in his publick discourses which might lessen the force of the Christian motives; nor remarked any thing in his conversation which might render his persuasions ineffectual. Let your practice therefore be proportionable to the advantages you have enjoy'd, that he may not be a witness against you hereafter; but that you may be his glory and joy in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. Think often of what he has said to you, of what he would now say, if he could speak. How earnestly would he persuade you to maintain the worship of God in your respective families; not to set the less, but the greater value upon your liberty, for your having enjoy'd it so long; to shew a just sense of this great blessing, by a constant and devout attendance on the worship of God on the Lord's-day? How importunately would he intreat you to † *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffer-*

* Mat. xxv. 21.

† Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3.

suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; to be stedfast in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye may be kept by the power of God unto the day of salvation.

Let the present solemnity lead us all to reflect seriously upon the certainty of death: since, as our writer says, *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.* From this sentence no man living is exempted, however distinguished by his rank, condition, or endowments. The guards of a sovereign prince cannot secure him from the hand of death, but this grim conqueror will enter his palace as well as the most lonely cottage †. He is not to be bribed by riches, but will lay the most wealthy mortal in the dust, on a level with the meanest wretch in the world. The wise and strong have no means to escape his stroke, but must yield to him as well as those whom they surpass in wisdom and strength. They who excel in spiritual gifts, and are most eminent for piety and good works, must go *the way of all the earth*. Youth can be no security to us, for death strikes the tender infant as well as the hoary head. All must die, but none will be happy in their death but they who have lived righteously. Let us therefore follow the steps of the deceased, of all good men, who are gone before us into that *rest which remaineth for the people of God*. From their constancy we see that 'tis possible to resist the allurements of sin, and to persevere in the christian life. It must therefore be our own fault, if we do not likewise continue stedfast and obtain the

* Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas,
Regumque turres. *Hor. Lib. I. Od. IV.*

future glory. We know virtue will be most for our present peace, satisfaction, and reputation, as well as make us remember'd with honour, and accompany us into the happy world above. We are under the same ties and engagements to live well, as they were, and have the word of God likewise to direct our steps. We have the same promises of divine assistance and eternal life to encourage us to resist all temptations, and to support us under all the trials of our present state. And tho the ministers who were the guides of our youth are taken from us one after another; let us remember that our blessed redeemer still liveth. With this consideration our writer animates the Hebrews to steadfastness in several places of this epistle. *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the son of God, let us hold fast our profession**. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangable priesthood. Wherefore he is also for ever able to save them who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them†. This indeed is the argument which he urges to move them to follow their leaders. *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to day, and for evermore ††*. “ Be not
 “ discouraged at the death of your ministers,
 “ nor afraid lest you should not be able to
 “ follow their faith; for tho they are dead,
 “ Jesus Christ is still alive, and is the same in
 “ goodness and power as he was when they
 “ were living. His compassion towards you
 “ will not fail, and his power is immutable
 “ as well as his doctrine and promises. Do
 “ you but give all diligence to make your cal-

* Ch. iv. 14.

† Ch. vii. 24.

†† Ch. xiii. 8.

“ling and election sure, and he will enable you
“to stand, and will reward your perseverance
“with a crown of righteousness at his second
“appearance.” Let us likewise comfort our selves
with the same consideration, and hold out unto
the end. O! do we not wish for that hap-
py day, when we shall enter into the presence
of God; when we shall see the blessed Jesus
and his holy apostles; when we shall be with
all the bright assembly of glorified saints, and
those who have been our ministers here; when
we shall understand those things which are too
high for our conceptions at present, and shall
live with them in the fulness of joy for ever and
ever.

F I N I S.



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